CLOSET

ISSUE NO.1

SS 2023

A Letter from the Founder

Dear Reader,

Here we are. On March 3rd, 2023, Republican lawmakers in five states introduced legislation limiting gender-affirming care such as puberty blockers, hormone therapy, and surgeries for minors. Yet here we are. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis threatened to withdraw state support for Advanced Placement programs when he rejected plans for an AP African American studies course, citing queer theory and intersectionality as an "indoctrination" and "a political agenda." Yet here we are. Roe v. Wade is dead.
Yet here we are. Violence targeted at Black bodies remains as high as ever, for they are killed at considerably higher rates than any other group.

Yet here we are.

Closet Magazine was created in the heat of these events. A time when progressive gender, race, and sexuality movements are blossoming through the cracks of oppression to escape its suffocating weight, only to be crushed again. It is a beautiful time to be queer, trans, woman, and/or BIPOC, but it's also an extremely terrifying one. At times, it seems to be that the easiest option is to give up.

But I choose not to.

I choose to fight back with queer joy, to continue planting seeds of hope to bloom so lavishly that the world quite literally chokes on the abundance of radical authenticity. My queerness. It can be found in every snip snip of scissors as I carve my hair until it settles above my ears. It can be found in the jingle jangle of my silver rings as they clash together, mesmerizing yet cold, intricate yet dainty. My radical womanhood. It can be heard in my moans of sexual pleasure, or even in my contagious laugh, roaring and soulful, warm and inviting. As you graze these pages filled with joy and pain, magic and triumph, see us, hear us. We, as marginalized students at Middlebury College, are ubiquitous.

It is the heat of the global countermovements that have created a landscape capable of sustaining new attainable territories. Closet is more than just another form of media – it's a space of possibility for you, for me, for all. See Closet as the deployment of a counter-power, and the affirmation of another type of power: that of an unapologetic display of raw souls, experiences and critiques, both individual and collective.

The theme of this issue as "(De)Construction" is anything but spontaneous. Chellis House – the site of our weekly meetings – has served as the kitchen where the craft has been grown, minced, caramelized, cooled, and served on a platter ready to be consumed by you. The Closet community is a space where racial, gender, class, and sexuality diversity elaborates its differences, where listening generates proximity, where the rhythm of thinking also gives a beat to the breath of harmonious existence together.

This is a power that liberates us. A power that gives us hope – cradles us, lifts us. It is one many before me have generated, and it is one I contribute to. This is a power that unites us.

Peace and Love,
Sophia Cole

SS 2023

(De) Construction

Dear Reader,

There is an undeniable desire in all of us to be seen. Tucked into the green, Middlebury College rests in a pupa wrapped in static contentment. But a cocoon only lasts till the seasons change. Our white cocoon has grown too thick for our tongues to breach. It is the time of the butterfly. Closet serves to crack the shell and stretch our wings for flight. When building this magazine, we understood that this first issue would serve as an explosion of expression cracking through the status quo.

By the end of our initial team meeting the Chellis living room pulsed with a concentration of imaginative energy. It was clear to us that voices from people of color, queer people, women, and those from low income homes on campus are desperately trying to soar, and our staff was determined to construct a dazzling tower for voices to jump off of and catch the wind. We hope these pages demolish the walls that once confined Middlebury's marginalized and that those feeling unsure and alone use it as a reference point to gain their bearings and find family.

When considering the theme of Closet's premiere issue, our team knew we wanted to play with the interaction between space and culture. The theme "(De)Construction" encapsules the idea that Closet is both constructing a space for marginalized cultures while deconstructing the dominating hegemonic force. We hope that with the construction of liberation comes a breakdown of the white, wealthy, cis, straight culture that reeks down from the Snowbowl onto our manicured lawns.

This undertaking is monumental and would not be possible without the Chellis House, specifically Karin Hanta, for giving us funding when our proposals were rejected elsewhere. Closet's in-house staff and official board sculpted and breathed life into this inaugural issue. There is no such thing as a magazine without content, and our student submissions are what made this magazine spectacular. Thank you to everyone who took a chance on a border publication, Closet!

With Love,
Sophia Cole, Gayathri Mantha, & Rose Saint-Clair

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ONE WITH THE FLOWERS

Evelyn Rodriguez

By Laura Wood

August 18, 2022

Dear Lavender,

College is slow and fast all at once. I find myself jumping between long stretches of time with nothing particular to do and spending whole days outside of my dorm room. As of right now, I'm still okay with the fact that I was given a single. All the roommate pairs I know seem to resent each other for existing in the same space. If we had belonged to a slightly more obsessive friend group in high school I think we'd have all gone to the same school. In that case, you and I would have probably shared a dorm. But alas, we are all well-adjusted young adults, and thus based our decisions off personal preference rather than group think. How dreadfully boring.

It's strange seeing how people interact with each other here. There's a kind of desperation behind everyone's attempts at closeness. Last Saturday night I found myself just sitting on the porch steps of a house party, watching pairs of people run off giggling into the night, holding hands and falling into one another. It's tempting, I won't lie, yet I feel sorry for them in an interesting way. I really do believe that everyone here is touch starved and devastated, alone and longing. They're just the ones covering it up for an hour or two with someone else. Who am I to judge?

I'm not- judging. It's possible that I'm envious, or maybe feeling empty myself. It's rare for me to outright acknowledge when I want something, so I'll have to roll this idea over in my head for at least another week, just to make sure I'm tormenting myself properly.

I hope you're doing well, genuinely. You told me there's not much weed where you are, which I find hard to believe. You picked a rural Vermont college for a reason, afterall. Still, stick with the soft drugs when you get the chance, you've never been able to handle your liquor.

I keep on trying to include you in my conversations here. I'll turn around to make a side comment and you just won't be there. I do the same when thinking of our other friends. I still haven't wrapped my head around the idea that you guys just aren't here, that you aren't coming. That I'll wake up in my room two months from now and still be the only person in my dorms that's even heard of our little town. Maybe soon it'll sink in that this isn't some two week summer camp-esque trip. That this is actually my life.

I've been writing a lot lately, nothing creative or special, just crystalized copies of the most extreme emotions I've been feeling. As I wait for the other shoe to drop, I crave intensity. I miss you, but in the same way that I used to when we needed to be apart from morning announcements until the second period. The momentary lack of you disturbs me, but I remain confident in your closeness, that I'll see you soon. In some ways, I still feel like that whenever I don't see you. I miss you.

~~Sincerely,~~ Love, Violet

Nerjes Azzam
“Home Away From Home”

"Home Away from Home" is a piece centered around how minority students at Middlebury present their identities at a predominantly white institution. Here, five students, including myself, illustrate how they have adjusted to the college life through cultural and religious elements. For some individuals, feeling "home" is through the items brought from them.

This piece captures cooking with Japanese ingredients bought from an at-home ethnic supermarket, eating Pakistani snacks sent in family-made care packages, the exhibition of a Somalian flag in a dorm room, the wearing of a Jewish necklace passed down through generations, and the mix between a Mexican quilt handmade by my very own grandmother and the jewelry that speaks my name before I can. Exhibiting this cultural or religious pride is just one of the many ways students are able to deconstruct the main identities that exist in a white Christian institution.

"Even though we are thousands of miles from our homes and cities, we are keeping in touch with who we were and are."

My Spell For Love

By Regan Olusegun

"If I ruled the world

(imagine that)

I'd free all my sons, I love 'em love 'em baby"

-Nas

Let me tell you the story of my people; the endlessly talented bearers of dreams and prose.
The magicians I revered while my peers were occupied with the Harry Potters and Percy Jacksons
of the world. The miracle workers who took hardship and with it turned art into magic.

My peers would exclaim with audacious curiosity, "Wingardium Leviosa!" in the hopes that they
would suddenly be freed from the constraints of gravity and sore into their quiet baby blue skies.
My spells though— they could be found in the space of time between the steady boom, boom,
boom of the drumbeat, each twang, each bang. They could be found in the riotous blast
of the trumpet, bellowing and soulful, soft and enveloping. They could be found in the lyrical
rebellion of the art form itself. I would find my spells in the brazen declarations of freedom these
magicians would weave into their Rap songs and poems. A citizen of two worlds,
I would hear the steady flow of these Black royalty and be transported back to the lands of my people.
This is where our mystical orators carry on our histories and dreams to the beat of a drum.
Here their voices lilt and warble, smooth like clay— sharp like stone.

Here their songs reach far beyond our ears and transcend even the line between life and death
—calling forth to gods and ancestral spirits alike for wisdom and prosperity.

The sons and daughters of these giants remember; they carry the music in their bones. Beloved
prophets, they speak life into our collective reverie; a land running with milk and honey—
free of the cyclical effects of capitalism and colonialism, racism and bigotry.
They empower our masses with the knowledge the academics refuse us— no cost, no fee.
They break up the vocab, switch up the cadence; our own brand of academia.
Our kind is provocative; it's boisterous. Ours is daring and brazen.
Ours is **Ghetto**.

Art: Ava

Marshall

Ghetto (ˈgedō)

noun
1. The condition of Black renaissance.

Adjective
1. The object or quality of being innovative.

Synonyms: excellent, revolutionary, genius.

This is the inheritance to which I cling. These divine incantations—poems, hymns— they sing in my blood. Here is where the magic will spring forth from; here is where my spells are born. The musical tones of 'do re mi' that comprise the language with which my people express; Their sufferings and prayers flowing steadily from Their hearts to the flat dirt upon which they dance. They stomp and jump and clap. They writhe in unabashed jubilation and thrust their arms and legs, driving Their prayers into the earth like a plea. I can't help but see these acts reflected in the sick flow and steady beats of their descendants. The J Coles and Kendrick Lamars— The Tupacs and Nas'. The storytellers, modern day griots who feel the magic of the beat from the soles of their feet to the ends of their dreads, coils, kinks and naps. The Black renaissance of the 70s and 80s spearheaded by the poppers and lockers, the break dancing gods who inspired graffiti art and hip hop culture— Grand Wizzard Theadore and his turntables. These legends who felt the groove of rebellion and spread the word.

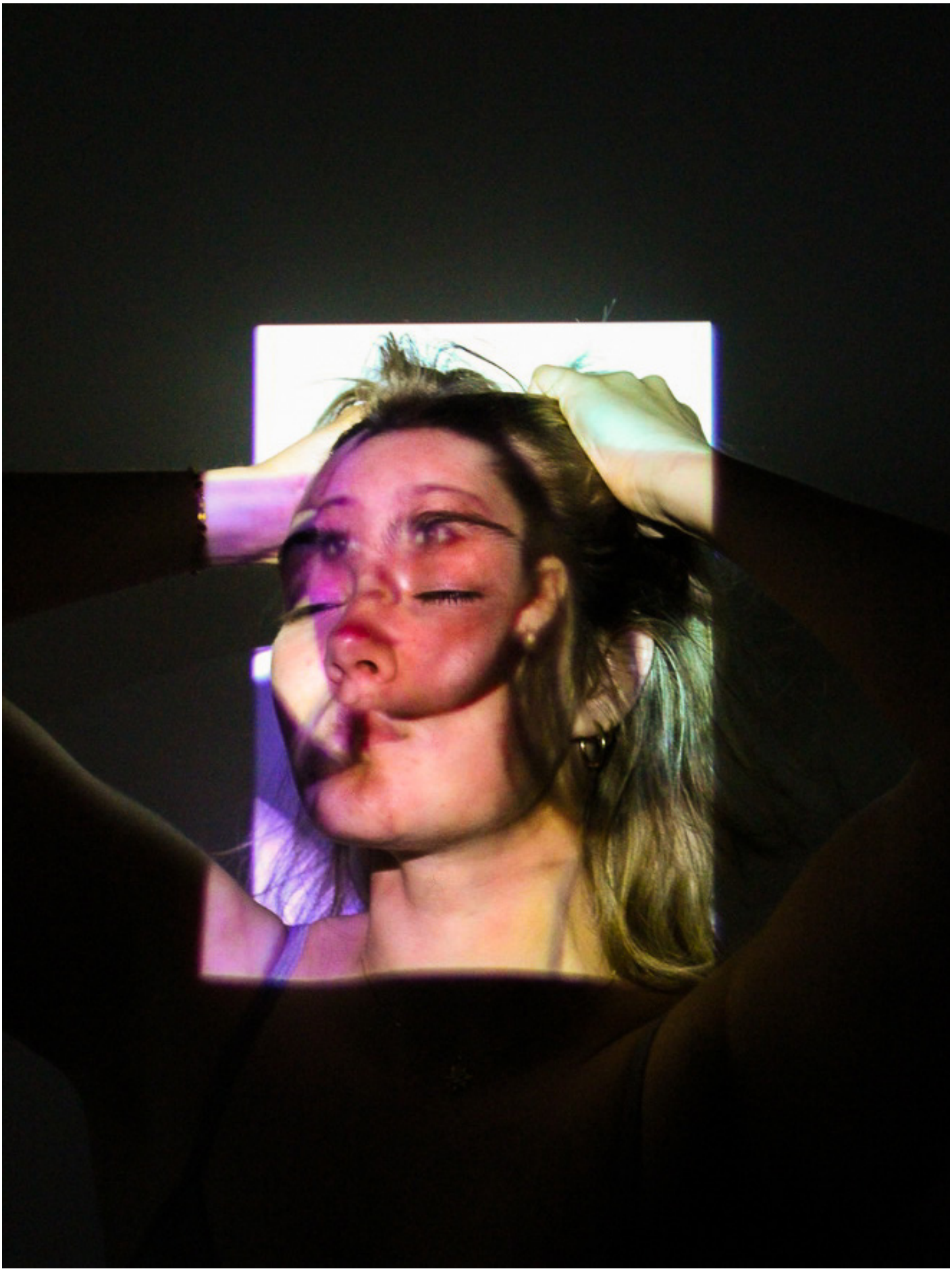
This is my spell— the divine prose and music of my people. I find the space of time between each note, each thrum of ancient magic that washes over me when I bob my head to their art— when I stomp in exaltation to the greater cause that leads us. When I close my eyes to the powerful words and see incredible swirls of red and black and green coloring my vision. The colors that denote pride, perseverance, and pan African unity.

This magic that frees us. This magic that loves us. This magic that has us wishing we ruled the world. This music is my magic; it is the spell that I did not invent but perpetuate. This is the spell for freedom. It is one I contribute to. I will add to the deep and bellowing song that denotes our stories and our histories —add a link to the chain of remembrance that makes us. I will harmonize and chant. I will stomp and send our dreams deep into the earth where they might take root and spring forth hope—triumph.

This is my spell to rule the world. This is my spell for love—unconditional and enduring. This is my spell to set my people free.

Digital Illusions

Olivia Irwin-Pokorny



September 9, 2022

Dear Violet,

Sorry for waiting so long to write back to you. I wanted to have at least stepped foot on campus instead of sending a letter about how much I hated our hometown and needed to leave. I don't actually hate it there, I just hated how little of it was left of it after all of you went to school.

It's funny you should mention us being well-adjusted adults. I had the thought the other day that if I were to really hate it here, I could transfer to Cornell, then I'd only be an hour or so away from you. I'll probably be fine- it's only been a few days. But it's a thought. The twenty minute drive to your house used to feel so long, like you lived on the edge of the world. After we said goodbye, I drove home and didn't see a single car. In my head everyone in the world had died but us, and it was just me, moving steadily away from the single other sign of life. I washed my face brutally that night. I thought there would be nothing left of me after I scrubbed all of you off. Yet here I am, 300 miles away and standing on my own.

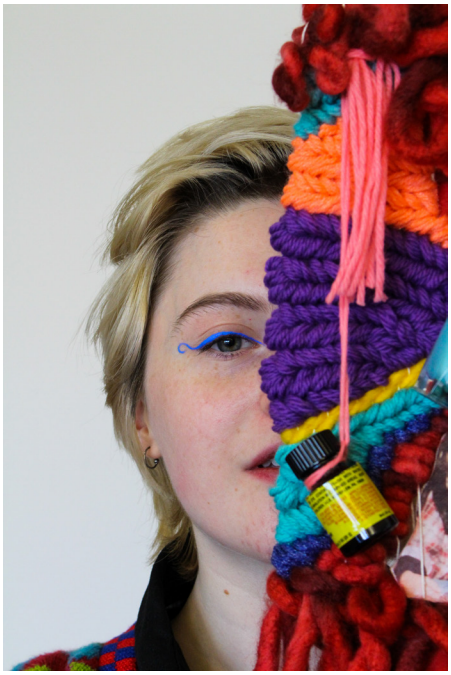
I've noticed a similar phenomenon with the social life here. Time moves slowly now, I spend my days in class and my nights doing work. Everything is condensed in a way that it's never been before. My life is funneled down to the weekend, and every Saturday I find myself with people for the first time in days, getting drunk and brushing up against one another. A girl grabbed at me last Friday, and my friends here pushed me to go for it in the same way they would encourage me to take another shot or hit. It's an alarming thought for me to have, almost objectifying, but it seems to be the only way to put my finger on the situation- people are substances to one another. A distraction, a fleeting joy, a way to enhance a night out. You know I can't handle my liquor.

Anyways, fall break is coming up, and I can't help but wonder if you might let me bridge the gap between us for a bit, a long weekend to be precise. I'll call you soon to flesh out the details regardless, but know that a good amount of my heart is already set on visiting you in New York.

I miss you, I'm excited to see you again.

Love, Lavender

TRANSWOVEN



Madison Middleton

"Transwoven" is an experimental weaving exploring the integration of various objects that pertain to non-binary and trans identities. Weaving as a medium allowed me to integrate histories and ideas tactilely and explore different compositional relationships between the chosen objects. In the bottom left corner, I chose an old picture of my grandmother who identifies as a butch lesbian. (When I explained my non-binary identity to her, she said, "Huh... That kinda sounds like me.")

In the top right corner, I chose a cropped image of Marsha P. Johnson, one of the most iconic and recognizable trans activists in American history. Both images serve as a tribute to queer elders and literally give eyes to the weaving with the past observing the present. Hanging from the left side of the weaving is an empty bottle of poppers (an important social drug for queer communities, specifically among gay men) and a bottle of nail polish (often used as a fun and/or transgressive form of gender expression). On the left, I've included a nearly empty roll of chest binding tape along with a silver chain necklace and an earring depicting two faces emerging from one. This section serves as a particularly personal expression of my trans/non-binary gender.

Orbit

by Emily Thompson

She wasn't sure if Adam knew what he did to her, if he could see – no, that was a lie.

One evening, they found themselves up working late, the only two staff members who knew sleep would be futile. Liv and Adam had sprawled out across the kitchen table of their nonprofit's headquarters hours ago, while the rest had gradually trailed to their rooms upstairs to turn in. Adam tilted his laptop screen down to take a breath from the training materials he was editing for the next week.

"Have you read the manifesto yet?"

He asked, his grin teasing but tinged with fatigue. Liv tucked a blonde strand of hair behind her ear and blushed.

"Yes."

"And…?"

A test. She was too tired for this conversation, but his curiosity gnawed at her. She aimed to impress, not to let him off easy with the response he wanted. He wouldn't make a communist of her overnight.

"Well, I still don't understand why you want to abolish private property completely. I mean, if anything is up for grabs because nothing belongs to anyone, the world would devolve into anarchy."

"Who told you that?"

She glared. His condescension had a way of waking her up.

"No one told me that. Can't I come to a conclusion myself?"

"Come on, Liv. Think. If there was no private property, if the big guys, the Jeff Bezoses, if they couldn't amass as much wealth as they do"

Letting his command to "think" slide for the moment, she was more interested in understanding his personal motives in this conversation than how global wealth redistribution and crime reduction would result from abolishing private property. Why did he seem to care so much about what she thought of capitalism when it was entirely out of her control? Control. She was losing it. She took a sip of lukewarm coffee.

"Adam, I can't."

"Can't what?"

She glared at him. Far past the point of being concerned with whether or not he could know what was going on in her mind, she softened her gaze, practically pleading with her eyes. Don't make me say it.

"Adam, I–"

she took another breath, steadying her gaze on the ceiling.

"I can't have this intellectual debate with you."

Her tone was steely, almost angry. Her eyes dropped to meet his.

"I can't seem to have any debate with you because I don't know how to think for myself when I'm with you."

She looked down and clamped her mouth shut before she said another word.

"What do you mean?"

Why was he acting like he didn't understand?

"Adam, please–"

"What do you mean?"

There it was again, the sentiment of loathing the person you'd do just about anything for. But this conversation was inevitable; it was only a question of when it would occur.

"Infatuated isn't the right word,"

she said, taking another sip in spite of herself, resigned to wherever this was headed.

"No, it's more like 'magnetized.' Subconsciously, I'm looking for you every time I walk into a room, and when you're there, it's like this pull, like I need to do things to stay in your orbit. And for some God knows reason, I feel required to please you, to impress you, to never interrogate anything you say. Don't tell me you can't see that."

He bowed his head, paused.

"No, I can't."

Not wanting him to see her hurt, she turned back to her laptop. Back to work.

Somehow, they regained some semblance of their normal banter and found their canvassing route the following day to be fairly routine. As the sun was setting, they walked back to the movement house, crossing over railcar tracks and dodging puffs of cigarette smoke. In the silence, the full weight of Liv's confession finally fell upon her. She lived across the hall from this guy. She shared meals with him, would see every girl he brought home, hell, she had to work with him to try to build a fucking movement to protect her fucking right to control her own fucking body… She stopped under a streetlight next to the park.

"You go ahead," she said, pointing her chin down the sidewalk.

"What, and let you walk alone in the park?"

"I know it contradicts what I said about my feelings for you, but technically,

you cannot let me or not let me do anything."

He bit his lip, stared down at his shoes as he strolled back to her, under the streetlight.

"Look, if I was Austin or Ishan or Trey, you'd let me walk you home, right?"

Liv could feel the weight of today's work in the hot city sun sink into her muscles, dragging her down. Did he need to do this, right here, right now? Somewhere in the sleeplessness of last night, Liv had decided she would no longer filter herself around him, a decision that felt both liberating and dangerous.

"That's not the point."

Her voice rose.

"I'm hurting right now, Adam. I'm tired. I'm trying to figure out how I will share a kitchen, and a bathroom, and a movement, and effectively a life with you for the foreseeable future, so I just want to pretend for half an hour like you and your words and rapists and muggers and gender aren't a thing! I want to walk in the park. Just let me have this, okay?"

"So you're endangering yourself, what, to punish me? To punish yourself?"

"Oh my god," she chuckled coldly, "it's amazing how you've conflated my desire to be liberated, to breathe, with your own ego. No, I'm not trying to put myself in danger, Adam. I just need this, okay?"

Her anger trembled at the end. He could hear the tears forming in her eyes.

They stood there for a moment or two, staring at the ground, their surroundings. Her breathing had slowed, her heart no longer screaming in her ears.

"Will you knock on my door when you get home?"

Home. The word made her chest ache. She nodded a yes.

"Kay. Thanks."

He offered her a soft smile. She stared back, her tears falling peacefully now.

She left him there, under the street light.

Art: Ava

Dear Lavender,

October 3, 2022

On your way to visit me, you had texted that liminal spaces feel very Violet, like trains or long hallways. I think I agree, I've felt so liminal lately. It's like I'm blending in between two spaces, my world covered with mist. I can hear you in the background of those settings sometimes, like you're trying to break down a door to get to me. How long can we stay liminal like this until I hurt you? my instinct tells me so strongly that if we get too close, some vague and terrible thing will happen and I'll never forgive myself or you. I wish it was as simple as just loving you, in that way I've never faltered. But you're different from everyone else.

When I think about your beauty, the details of which I will avoid listing as it feels crass, the pit that forms in my stomach makes me shut down and avoid thinking further. A sense I can't fully discern, something between intoxicating, painful and dreadful lies in that pit tangled below all the other casual feelings that compose our friendship. I'm afraid of it being one of wanting and am equally afraid of it being genuine or false. If I had to call it something, I'd say I was biblically tempted to sin. The air between us has too much reverence—loving you feels like desecrating holy land.

I'm not sorry that I kissed you, it needed to happen. We've both been building to this for too long. I am sorry for what needs to follow afterwards. Something tells me you weren't thinking along the same lines as me, for once. The only thing I refuse to give up is myself, and I feel that with you I might make myself. I have often had the thought that I would do anything to make you happy, a task that I know has more to do with chemical balances than personal actions, but one I still try tirelessly to do. It's not that you want more than me, but that we both want it too badly. I don't trust either of us with each other.

I want to be less, is what I'm basically saying. At the risk of turning this into a sports metaphor, we were trapped on third for too long. We needed to make it back to home base before we could think about anything else. To be brutally frank, I don't see a future for us as a unit. We needed to come together to separate. Jump before you can fall and all of that. I don't know if I'm making sense. I'm sure you get it—you always do.

In the midst of these thoughts and mental gymnastics in my head, you are still, always, just Lavender. I miss you, but the air between us can finally clear.

Hope to hear from you soon,

Violet

Notes from class, 2023

hey hi hello
Aaaaaaaaahhh!!!!!!
man, I'm dealing with a lot right now
school
social
family
world events
....me too....
OCD
lesbian + trans
there's too much always
time to go
LIFE IS HEA
but also kinda silly, kinda fun
BOO LAME. DOUBLE THUMBS DOWN
hey
hey
I love you and I appreciate you and you're doing so great
also you're hot
practicing my positive self talk (?)
To do:
laundry
dishes
shower
paper proposal
Ch. 3-4
12:38am - 15 pushups
2:13am - 10 pushups
For upcoming therapy:
- fuck insurance
- can't seem to get anything done
- top surgery letter
- active shooter threat
clean up
why didn't she love me? she broke my heart. I will hate them forever
My name is
My name is
My name is ?
THEY DO NOT GET TO DECIDE
I AM SO TIRED!!! OF EVERYTHING!!!
I care so much... too much?
they/them/he?
Example counseling video
- interview with 10 year old
- in concrete operations stage of development
- can recognize things about himself (ex: good at math, but not good at math class)
- could be better to have visual aids, objects (ex: act out examples and strategy instead of talking about it in abstract terms)
- in stage 4 of Erikson's stages (industry vs. inferiority)
- competance, contribution, productivity, etc. vs. inferiority
- developmentally becoming able to compare themselves to others
- starting to have ideas of themselves as capable people
Wednesday lab
soon(?)
'cause what the fuck

The Veneer of Gayness

Kyle Hooker

My gaydar has been thoroughly tested since coming to Middlebury. Upon arriving at this school, I was excited to witness the existence of a vibrant queer community. Even though my freshman hall was single-gendered and very straight, it seemed like the broader community was pretty queer. At the time I had known I was gay for a while but was just starting to be more comfortable expressing my sexuality; I was eager to have some action.

As I became increasingly lonely and touch-starved, the yearning for intimacy and a relationship grew more and more intense. I kept telling myself that it would happen eventually, that I would meet people soon. Needless to say, nothing happened for a couple of years, until I finally decided to just bite the bullet and get on some apps, something I had been resistant to for a while. Since then, I have been having hookups and have dated a couple of men casually, all of them off campus. In that long period of time during my freshman, sophomore, and first half of my junior year, I had many crushes on men, of varying durations and intensities (not to mention all of my high school crushes). ***Pining over these men was both thrilling and torturous. I rarely worked up the courage to tell any of them my feelings, until I found out that either they had a partner (almost always a female-identifying person), or they were not attracted to men, even though they presented in a very artsy, queer-looking way– jewelry/piercings, painted nails, long hair, tattoos, etc.***

Perhaps these are the "heteroflexbles," "bi-curious," or "metrosexuals" that some talk about. This is the main reason that I do not like Harry Styles as a person; he only dates women publicly and presents in a flamboyant manner to attract their attention. Some praise his courageous ways for wearing traditionally feminine clothing but forget that people like

David Bowie did this fifty years ago. Ultimately, I was increasingly getting the sense that many bisexual men in my community seem mostly attracted to and interested in women; they might fool around with a hot guy at a party while intoxicated, but they exclusively date women.

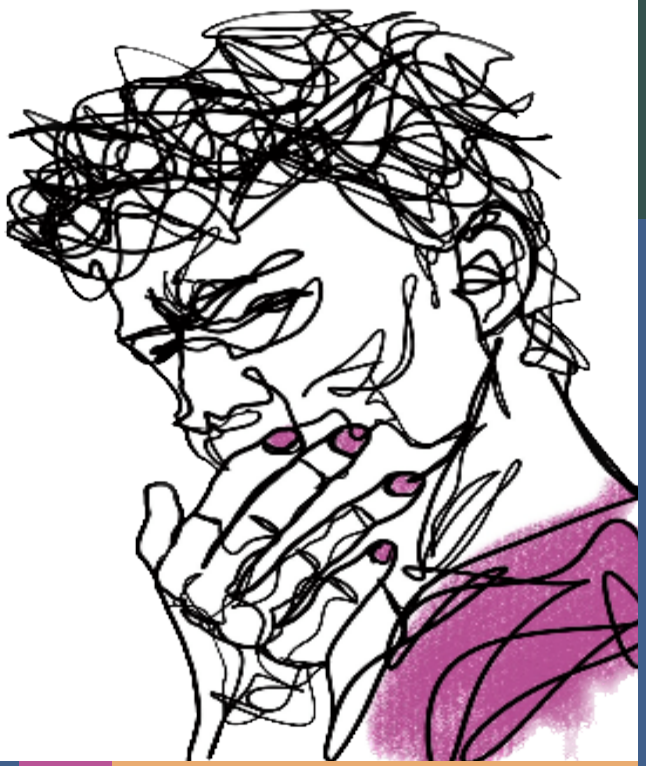
Last year, I became good friends with someone who uses he/they pronouns and presents in a very hip, artsy style; he paints his nails often, has ear and nose piercings, and has impeccable fashion. I began to develop feelings for him and was pretty sure that he was at least bi. Alas, he told me that he was "straight-ish." My heart sank a bit. It left me thinking, damn, I could have sworn he was bi!

I am aware that bisexuality is a spectrum, but simultaneously I feel that what I'm describing is too much of a pattern to be pure coincidence. Some of this relates to internalized homophobia and simply practicality – there seem to be more women who like men than men who like men. I am not demanding that this pattern requires an explanation per se, but I am curious to explore other factors that may contribute to this phenomenon.

Of the handful of gay men on campus that I know, many of them are looking for hookups and nothing more than that. I try not to harbor any judgment towards these people; different people are at various stages of emotional availability and desired level of commitment. That said, it is still remarkable that I do not know any gay men on this campus who are in a relationship.

Quite frankly, it is difficult to find the time and energy to commit to a serious relationship at a rigorous institution like Middlebury– maybe this is a bit dystopian when you think about it. ***After all, relationships (whether platonic or not) are what give meaning to our lives.*** Therefore it's crucial that we protect some regular time in our lives for ourselves and for the important people in our lives–school and work are not all there is to life.

I want to make clear that I am cognizant of the widely varied levels of comfort someone of any romantic/sexual identity may have in engaging in different types of romantic and/or sexual relationships. Still, I believe that it is so important to have difficult conversations like this among people of varying queer identities that have historically and currently hold tension. ***It is in these vulnerable conversations that we can form deeper connections with each other and empower ourselves.***



Art: Harper

Gayathri Mantha

December 14, 2022

Dear Violet,

I don't need to call attention to the amount of time that's passed, in some ways I hope you felt it as acutely as I did. Simply put, I needed time. Excuse me, but I'm going to say that a lot in this letter. 'I'. Me me me.

It's time for selfish tendencies to come to light.

I want this to be clear, sharply cut, sterile, but I doubt that I'm capable of that. I'll make no promises for complete honesty and instead focus all my efforts on trying to swallow down the bulge in my throat.

I love you, I've loved you for years now. We kissed on your bed and you carved my chest open in return. I think a part of me will always be there- bleeding out in your dorm room, waiting for you to love me back. I know you do, or did, love me in all the ways that matter. I wonder if that would have been enough.

I think I can see your point, about there being too much between us, if I squint. You confuse me though, as to why it would be bad. You crave intensity, have said it yourself, and I crave that level of understanding that I've only ever experienced with you. Sometimes I need to remind myself that you don't also exist inside my head, I feel as though I never need to say my thoughts out loud to you-that you know them all instinctively.

Don't get me wrong, this is not a manifesto as to why I believe we should be in a relationship, rather it is almost the opposite. I took a month, maybe more, to refocus on what we should look like. When you kissed me, I found myself dragged into the open. We loved each other for a few days, and then upon returning, I found myself abandoned- alone in the clearing. Given these circumstances, I hope you'll forgive my mourning time.

I'm ready – or as ready as I will be within a given amount of time – to talk to you again. I've missed you, but I needed to be sure if it was the you before the visit that I missed. My friend Violet.

We've been linked for so long that for a while I wasn't sure if there was anything else left. I'm still not certain whether our friendship was ever truly platonic in nature, even while each of us were seeing other people. Just last year, you didn't invite your boyfriend over after I left for the night, because you wanted your sheets to still smell like me come morning.

Maybe we've never been normal, but it's time to start to be. If not for our own sakes, then for our friends. So, I'm ready to start trying, to move upwards and out and to bury this thing between us like a childhood dead fish in the backyard. I love you, but I'm ready to start acting like I don't. So what do you think? What is left for us?

Sincerely, Lavender

[no further letters sent]

Recipe for Disaster

Gillian Skidmore

I've been pondering,
Puzzling,
Playing,
Toying
With the idea
Of a little fantasy
Between you and me

I know it's not real
And maybe can't be.
That's okay-
I can still
Daydream.

I've never been a good cook
I prefer to be fed,
But there's a first time for everything,
So I don my apron and
Get to work.

I let the senses simmer,
Never boil,
(a brush of the knuckles...
a glance or a gaze, look away)
Turn that knob all the way down
And back up
Just a little,

Put it on the back burner,
Wrap it up and tuck it away
In a secret drawer
Hidden in the corner of the kitchen,
Guard it with garlic, onions,
Silver and salt.

Let it lie,
Caramelize
And come back
Another time
To taste.

...sy
...ou and me

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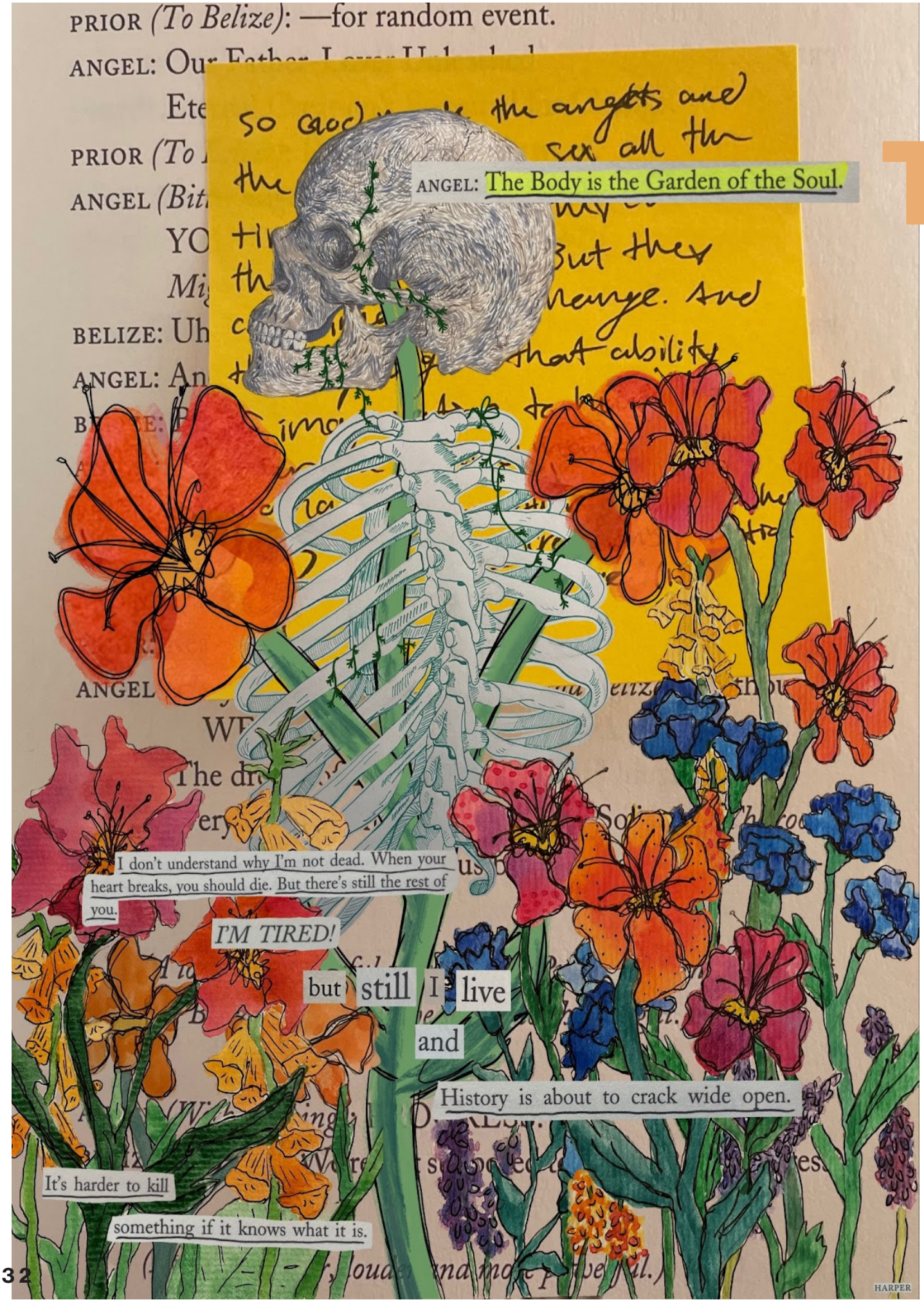
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ANGEL: The Body is the Garden of the Soul.
I don't understand why I'm not dead. When your heart breaks, you should die. But there's still the rest of you.
I'M TIRED!
but still I live
and
History is about to crack wide open.
It's harder to kill
something if it knows what it is.
HARPER

Th

e Body is The Garden of the Soul

Harper

This collage draws words from the play “Angels in America” and reflects my own understanding of queerness and constructions of the body. I view the body as something to be tended to, as the home for a person’s soul. To be queer is to allow the soul to lead, to water the flowers growing between the cracks, to survive and morph and lift our faces to the sun. To be queer is to weather the storms with complete awareness of self - “it’s harder to kill something if it knows what it is.”

Closet Cinema: The Closet is Buring

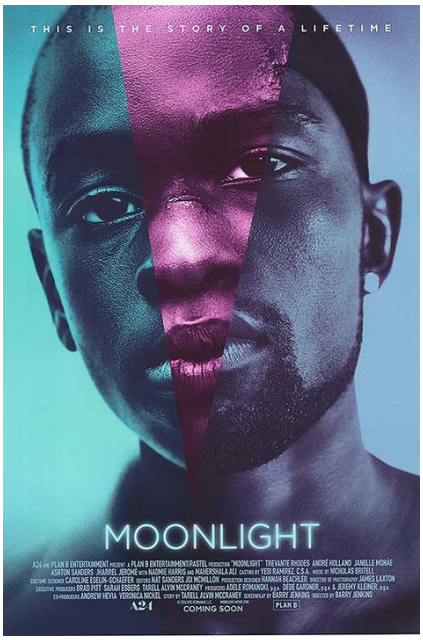
Kheyla Janai Lindsey

Movies are really important, but what's more important is the effect they have on the people watching them. In this very 1st edition of what I'm calling "Closet Cinema", I want to introduce five films about queerness, and highlight the significance of these films on not only the queer community itself, but also the idea of queerness they have constructed for non-queer folks. Does the movie demonize queer people? Does it paint their stories realistically? Are the actors even queer? These are all important questions, because while queer people know themselves and their community, non-queer people who don't know might hold negative biases. Though their opinions shouldn't matter, their comments and actions might have real impacts depending on the way they are presented. The movies I've decided to watch, review, comment on and potentially critique are "household" queer films that are either more recent or popular. (I will try my best at keeping spoilers to a minimum).

"ONE OF THE BEST FILMS I'VE SEEN THIS YEAR!"
Joel Siegel, GOOD MORNING AMERICA
Having a ball...
...wish you were here.
PARIS IS
burning
A Jennie Livingston film
PRESTIGE PRESENTS · A JENNIE LIVINGSTON FILM · PARIS IS BURNING
STARRING DORIAN COREY · PEPPER LABEIJA · VENUS XTRAVAGANZA · OCTAVIA ST. LAURENT · WILLI NINJA · ANJI XTRAVAGANZA
FREDDIE PENDAVIS · JUNIOR LABEIJA · CO-PRODUCED BY BARRY SWIMAR · EDITED BY JONATHAN OPPENHEIM
CINEMATOGRAPHY BY PAUL GIBSON · PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY JENNIE LIVINGSTON · A PRODUCTION OF OFF WHITE PRODUCTIONS, INC.
PRESTIGE

Paris is Burning (1990) by Jennie Livingston; 98% Rotten Tomatoes

A documentary that should be a right of passage for every queer person (and really everyone else in today's society). Set in New York in the late 80s, the film takes us into the lives of Queer Black and Latines making names for themselves in the Ball community. If you're new to queer media and see terms that seem unfamiliar, this is the right documentary to watch, because it has chapters that touch on key terms used within the community. In this beautiful yet tragic tale, we see the lives of young BIPOC and their new found family after they were shunned by their original "family". The film is so personal that the viewer often finds themselves rooting for the characters. This documentary is the epitome of the queer experience for Black and Brown people: so much of today's culture and slang originates from peak 80s ballroom culture that it's only fair to pay homage and give credit to the og's! I also think it's so beautiful how a lot of the people that the film centered around aspired to make names for themselves outside of the ballroom world and were able to with the help of this documentary.



Moonlight (2016) by BarryJenkins; 98% Rotten Tomatoes

In this film set in the 1980s in Miami during the war on drugs, we follow the life of Chiron as he struggles to find himself. The story is told in 3 parts – Chiron as a child, as a teen, and as an adult. While trying to find who he is, his main struggle involves grappling and coming to terms with his sexuality. Though the director is not queer himself and has stated it for the record, this film doesn't center itself around JUST a queer man: it centers itself around a queer Black man and the experience these two identities combine to create. The film portrays homophobia within the Black community, poverty, drug sale, abuse, and how difficult being a single mother can be sometimes. In "Paris is Burning", Pepper LaBeija shared advice that his father had given him, "You have three strikes against you in this world. Every black man has 2... that they're black and male. But you're black, and you're a male, and you're gay. You're gonna have a hard fucking time. But he [my father] said,

'If you're going to do this, you're gonna have to be stronger than you've ever imagined.'"

I think this quote encapsulates Chiron's and many other Black men's experience of being queer. Although he doesn't have a father, Chiron is able to have a semi-postive male figure, Juan, who helps him in his journey at a young age, and doesn't turn away

Too Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar (1995) by Beeban Kidron; 43% Rotten Tomatoes

This movie tells the story of 3 drag queens traveling across the country to compete in a beauty pageant in Hollywood. Vida and Noxema Jackson, as experienced drag queens, take newcomer Miss Chi-Chi Rodriguez under their wing and use the money they have won in a previous competition to drive her to the pageant. Along the way, as they encounter problems, they seek shelter in a small country town while repairing their car. The townspeople, unaware that the three are drag queens, end up accepting them as one of their own and learning much from these "city girls". The three have completely different personalities, and Miss Chi-Chi is the complete opposite from the other two since she's "new school" while the others are "old school". Vida and Noxema go for a more elegant and classy look, while Chi-Chi's look is more 90s, more bold and colorful.

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